

DESCARTES,  
THE CONCEPT OF WOMAN  
AND  
THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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While considering the relation of philosophers to the acts and writings of individuals directly involved in the events in France from 1789-92, some scholars drawn upon Hobbes and Locke and concentrated on their new views towards political authority, some further have emphasized Rousseau's philosophy of a free society of the sovereignty of men, others have concentrated on Thomas Paine and the philosophy of the American Revolution, and still others have suggested that philosophy had little effect on the actual events of the revolution. 1. In this year of the bi-centennial anniversary of the Storming of the Bastille I would like to take a slightly different approach by considering the works of Descartes, the founder of modern philosophy. Specifically, when the 'lever of reason' is applied to the philosophy of sex identity to move the world of thought in relation to the events of the French Revolution at least two central features of Descartes Meditations stand out as crucial to a contemporary understanding of the thinking that took place at that time in history.

Firstly, Descartes emphasized the mind and reason as the central aspect of human identity. Secondly, Cartesianism became associated with a dualistic separation of mind and body. In Meditations on First Philosophy Rene Descartes (1596-1650) stated: "I am therefore, to speak precisely, only a thinking being, that is to say, a mind, an understanding, or a reasoning being...I am not this assemblage of members which is called a human body." 2. This Cartesian view of the self as primarily a "reasoning being" provides a key to open central arguments about sex identity in relation to the French Revolution.

Two symbols have become identified with the French Revolution over the past two centuries: the bastille and the guillotine. Analogically these symbols serve

as two loci for the philosophy of sex identity articulated in the tumultuous events at the beginning and towards the end of the revolution. Specifically, the key to the bastille can be seen as analogous to the discovery that reason could free an individual from constraints of custom, convention, tradition, and despotism. The importance of the symbol of the key to the bastille cannot be underestimated. Lafayette gave one key to George Washington which still resides in the front hall of his Mount Vernon residence; he gave another one to Thomas Paine. Similarly the 'key' of human reason was passed from one individual to the other as a way of opening the prison door that the tyranny of custom had closed on women's access to education and public life. The second symbol of the revolution is the guillotine---an instrument of destruction which mechanically caused death by cleanly separating the head from the body. During the Reign of Terror the "guillotine va toujours" as it relentlessly severed head from body of thousands of men, women, and children. 3. Can the evident possibility of analogy with the extreme consequences of Cartesian dualism be missed? When reason is detached from the living body which sustains it, a kind of death results.

In order to bring forward for consideration the philosophical bases for the above mentioned analogies, this paper will be divided into two parts: in the first, the progressive use of reason in the context of arguments of sex identity will be studied in relation to Cartesian philosophy; and in the second, the expansion of use of reason in arguments about sex identity will be studied in particular relation to the French Revolution.

### Part I: Reason and Equality

The influence of Descartes' thought on arguments about sex identity was

extraordinary considering the fact that he did not directly consider the subject himself. Instead, Descartes, by emphasizing the central place of reason in human identity, provided a new philosophical grounding for a theory of equality of men and women. This fact was quickly noticed by a series of philosophers who came to be called: "Cartesian Feminists" or "Reason's Disciples." 4.

The first disciple of reason was Anna Maria van Schurman who published De ingenii muliebris ad doctrinum et meliores in 1641, the same year as Descartes published his Meditations. Van Schurman's text was translated into English in 1659 with the title The Learned Maid; or Whether a Maid may be a Scholar? A Logick Exercise. 5 Van Schurman and Descartes were personal friends for a few years, and while they disagreed on many subjects including the circulation of blood or the meaning of the Bible, they both accepted the central position of reason in human identity. In her text, Van Schurman used the scholastic method throughout. She concluded one argument as follows:

A Maid may be a Scholar...The Assertion may be proved both from the property of the form of this Subject; or the rational soul: and from the very acts and effects themselves. For it is manifest that Maids doe actually learn any Arts and Sciences. 6.

In this appeal to the rational soul van Schurman reveals just the barest beginnings of a move to appeal to reason to defend an equal opportunity for the women to be educated equal to men. However, throughout most of the text she does not put the argument in this form.

It is helpful to reflect on the important work of one philosopher who predated Descartes to emphasize that the appeal to reason as a basis for equality is a post-Cartesian methodology. The philosopher Marie de Gournay le Jars (1566-1645) published in 1622 Egalité des hommes et des femmes. In this extremely popular text de Gournay did not appeal once to reason in itself as a

basis for the equality of the sexes. Instead she appealed to the philosophical authority of Plato and Socrates: "who allot women equal rights, faculties and functions in their Republics and everywhere else." 7 Marie de Gournay also used a theological claim of the creation of man and woman as equal to support her thesis that: "The virtue of man and woman is one and the same thing." 8. In none of her arguments did de Gournay appeal to reason as the basis for equality. In fact, in Grief des Dames which was published in 1626 she directly attacked the deprivation of liberty and goods that woman experienced, and yet in her argument there is still just the twin appeal to the authority of Platonic philosophers and God. 9.

The next Cartesian philosopher to address this question was François Poullain de la Barre (1647-1723). In De L'égalité des deux sex, published in 1673, arguments for the physical, mental, and moral equality of women and man were given. Poullain continuously used arguments based on reason to challenge custom, convention, and tradition. He claimed that in every sphere of activity that was usually open to men and closed to women that there was no reasonable basis for this distinction:

These kinds of Reasonings proceed from the Conceit that we have of the Equity of our Sex; and a false Notion which Men forge to themselves of Custom: It is enough with them to find that a thing is established, to make them believe it is well grounded. 10

Poullain then turned to refute claim that differences between the sexes were significant. He argued that there while the body had certain sex differences related to reproduction, the spirit, brain, and faculties were the same in women and men, and they were "equally capable of the same things." 11

Poullain appealed, as did others before him, to God as an original source of the equality of man and woman. However, he spoke also about the uniting of

soul to body, and about the greater clarity of a philosophical rather than theological argument which focused directly on the anatomy and the faculties of the mind. "In effect, we All (both Men and Women) have the same Right to Truth, since the Mind in all of us is alike capable to know it; and that we are (All) affected in the same manner, by the Objects that make Impression upon the Body."

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The Cartesian philosopher concluded that the equality of nature and rights was the lever that lifted up the limited customs of the past:

"So that there is nothing but weakness, or a secret and blind interest which can make men say, that Women ought to remain shut out from Learning, for this reason, that they have never been publicly admitted to any share therein It fareth not with the goods of the mind, as with the goods of the body; against them there is no prescription: and how long soever, we have been deprived thereof, we have alwayes the right of Reversion." 13.

While the emphasis in Poullain's argument above was the right of woman to education, he also argued that she could participate in the active life of a citizen through leadership in law, ruling, or even bearing arms. In all cases, he referred back to a more fundamental equality of the mind as his basis for his argument.

The final philosopher of sex identity to be considered in this section on Cartesian influence on arguments about woman is the British writer Mary Astell (1688-1731) who published in 1694 A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for their Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest. In this text Astell's proposal for an educational institution for women used many arguments which followed the Cartesian pattern identified above. She began with the usual theological appeal: "For since God has given Women as well as Men intelligent Souls, why should they be forbidden to use them?" 14. Next she used an analogy from prison imagery to defend the effective use of reason:

As prejudice fetters the Understanding so does Custom manacle the Will, which scarce knows how to divert from a Track which the generality around it take, and to which it has it self been habituated...Custom cannot Authorise a Practice if Reason Condemns it, the following a Multitude is no excuse for the doing of Evil.  
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Mary Astell next described a philosophical methodology to be taught to women in her higher institution of education; the method followed a Cartesian model of argument of deduction from first principles. It began with "clear and distinct ideas" and moved to conclusions derived from these principles. She added: "Supposing us reasonable Creatures, we can not withhold our assent from them without manifest violence to our Reason." 16 Astell, a full hundred years before the French Revolution, argued that Reason was the key that freed the prejudices of custom from their prison.

In 1696 a text published "by a lady" and entitled An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex, was attributed through the centuries to Mary Astell. The author stated in the dedication that her goal was not to prove the superiority of woman over man, but rather "to reduce the Sexes to a Level, and by Arguments to raise Ours to an Equality at most with Men." 17 Her argument considered whether traditional inequality of men and woman was a consequence of an inequality of soul or of body:

To proceed therefore if we be naturally defective, the Defect must be either in Soul or Body. In the Soul it can't be, if what I have hear'd some learned Men maintain, be true, that all Souls are equal and alike, and that consequently there is no such distinction, as Male and Female Souls...

Neither can it be in the Body, (if I may credit the Report of learned Physicians) for there is no difference in the Organization of those Parts, which have any relation to, or influence over the Minds; but the Brain, and all other Parts (which I am not Anatomist enough to name) are contriv'd as well for the plentiful conveyance of Spirits, which are held to be the immediate Instruments of Sensation, in Women, as Men. I see therefore no natural Impediment in the structure of our Bodies; nor does Experience, or Observation argue any: We use all our Natural Faculties, as well as Men, nay and

our Rational too, deducting only for the advantages before mention'd. 18

While Astell's primary focus was the right to an equal education for women, and in this particular text the value of converse among intellectual women and men, she also considered woman's rights for participation in government. In the following passage she reflected on the situation in France in the century preceding the revolution:

And even in France, a Country that treats our Sex with more Respect than most do, We are by the Salique Law excluded from Sovereign Power, the French are an ingenious People, and the Contrivers of that Law knew well enough, that We were no less capable of Reigning, and Governing well, than themselves; but they were suspicious, that if the Regal Power shou'd fall often into the hands of Women, they would favour their own Sex, and might in time restore 'em to their Primitive Liberty and Equality with the Men, and so break the neck of that unreasonable Authority that so much affect over us; and therefore made this Law to prevent it. 19.

This appeal to "primitive liberty and equality with men" was echoed time and again in writings of the French Revolution. The two premisses that "in the beginning" man and woman were in a state of equality and that there was an innate right to transform society to achieve this equality, became the basis for the attempt to bring women into an equal participation in citizenship in new revolutionary societies. In Part II of this paper specific evidence for this claim will now be examined.

## Part II: Reason and the Revolution

The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America stated that it was a self evident principle that all men were created equal, and that



they were given by God the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In 1776 Thomas Paine (1737-1809) published Common Sense in which he argued "Mankind being originally equals in the order of creation, the equality could only be destroyed by some subsequent circumstance." 20. The question of whether this original equality included women and as well as men was left ambiguous, as Paine stated further: "Male and female are the distinctions of nature, good and bad the distinction of heaven." 21.

In 1787 Condorcet (1743-1794) directly raised the question of the relation of woman to the American Revolution in "Lettres d'un Bourgeois de New-Haven sur l'unité de la législation". He raised the crucial question of the natural right of woman to participate in citizenship:

We want a constitution, the principles of which would be based solely upon the natural rights of man, anterior to social institutions. We call these rights natural because they are derived from man's nature, that is to say, because from the moment that there exists a sensitive being, *able to reason* and have moral ideas, it follows, from an evident, necessary consequence, that he must enjoy these rights, that he cannot be deprived of them without injustice...Is it not as sensitive beings, reasonable, having moral ideas, that men have rights? Women must then have absolutely the same and yet never, in any so-called free constitution, have women exercised the right of citizenship. 22

In this passage an explicit use of the common presence of reason in women and man was given to defend the equality of rights of the sexes.

The effort to draft a Bill of Rights in France was first attempted by Lafayette in 1789. It was revised in 1791 and ended with the right to vote and hold office being given to male citizens only. The exclusion of women from citizenship in the new Republic did not reflect the role of women in the revolution itself. As George Rudé claimed: "It was the women who took the initiative and brought their menfolk into action after them." 23 On October 5, 1789 women stormed the Hôtel de Ville for bread; and in the preceding and

ensuing months they marched the streets for eggs, butter, and soap. Their secondary aim was to help get arms.

One woman Théroigues de Méricourt acted as a military leader in the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789 as well as during the above mentioned Insurrection of Women. Later she proposed to form an "Amazon's battalion, and in a public speech she appealed to reason to defend the equal rights of women to bear arms:

We arm: we shall show the men that we are not inferior to them either in virtue or in courage...In order to realize our rights and obligation *we must take reason for arbiter*, and, guided by her, we shall distinguish the just from the unjust. 24

In view of women's participation in the events of the revolution it was not surprising to discover that women were embittered by the direction that constitutional law took after the cooperative efforts that they had undertaken with men. Soon arguments were presented to the national assembly which demanded equality of rights for women under the law. For example, in the summer of 1791 Etta Palm d'Aelders presented her Adresse des citoyennes françoises à l'Assemblée nationale. In this document she appealed to philosophy to bring in an equality of rights within a context the private sphere of marriage:

It is too late to equivocate. *Philosophy* has drawn truth from the darkness; the time has come; justice, sister of liberty, calls all individuals to the equality of rights, without discrimination of sex. 25

The truth of philosophy was a truth discovered and defended by reason.

Probably the most important text written on sex identity in 1791 was the document sent by Olympe de Gouges, the pen name for Marie Gouze (1748-1793) to Marie Antoinette entitled; Les Droits de la Femme. In her dedication to the Queen, Olympe de Gouges appealed for help in the reinstatement for women of the "rights they have lost in society."26 In Article 1 of The Declaration of Rights

of Woman and the Female Citizen she declared that "Woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights." 27 Marie Olympe De Gouges linked justice and liberty with this original right of equality among the sexes:

Article IV: Liberty and justice consist of restoring all that belongs to others; thus, the only limits on the exercise of the natural rights of woman are perpetual male tyranny; these limits are to be reformed the *laws of nature and reason*. 28.

Here we have beautifully expressed the significant role of reason in this revolutionary activity which sought to restore an original equality of women and men. In the powerful postscript to her document Olympe de Gouges heralded reason as a bell calling women to active participation in creating a new world order:

Women, wake up; *the tocsin of reason* is being heard throughout the whole universe; discover your rights...The reclamation of your patrimony, based on the wise decrees of nature---what have you to dread from such a fine undertaking?...Do you fear that our French legislators, correctors of that morality, long ensnared by political practices now out of date, will only say again to you: women, what is there in common between you and us? Everything, you will have to answer. If they persist in their weakness in putting this non sequitur in contradiction to their principles, *courageously oppose the force of reason* to the empty pretensions of superiority; unite yourself beneath the standards of philosophy; deploy all the energy of your character, and you will soon see these haughty men, not grovelling at your feet as servile adorers, but proud to share with you the treasures of the Supreme Being. 29.

Olympe de Gouges wanted the complete equality of man and woman in the public as well as the private sphere. Therefore she argued that women should be able to participate in government on a equal status with male citizens; " it must be the same for all: male and female citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, must be equally admitted to all honors, positions, and public employment according to their capacity and without other distinctions besides those of their virtues and talents." 30

The French Revolution stirred a flurry of debate about fundamental questions of equality and rights. Edmund Burke (1729-1797) severely criticized the

principles and the practices of the revolution in his 1790 text entitled Reflections on the Revolution in France. Thomas Paine responded with The Rights of Man in 1791; and in the same year Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) published A Vindication of the Rights of Man. In all of these texts the question of woman's rights was only obliquely considered. Wollstonecraft argued at great length against Burke's views of women in a 1757 text entitled Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful. 31. However, it was not until she published in 1792 A Vindication of the Rights of Woman that Wollstonecraft built on the foundation of argument that Marie Olympe de Gouges had articulated in Les droits de la femme.

In her opening letter to A Vindication of the Rights of Woman Mary Wollstonecraft appealed to reason: "Who made man the exclusive judge, if woman partake with him *the gift of reason*?" 32. She argued that if woman has a "*parity of reason*" with man then, she should have full citizenship with man:

But, if women are to be excluded, without having a voice, from a participation of the natural rights of mankind, *prove first*, to ward off the charge of injustice and inconsistency, *that they want reason*---else this flaw in your New Constitution will ever shew that man must, in some shape, act like a tyrant, and tyranny, in whatever part of society it rears its brazen front, will ever undermine morality. 33

At the conclusion of her introduction she requested the inclusion of women in the revision of the French Constitution:

I wish, Sir, to set some investigations of this kind afloat in France; and should they lead to a confirmation of my principles, when your constitution is revised the Rights of Woman may be respected, if it be fully proved that *reason calls for this respect*, and loudly demands Justice for one half of the human race. 34

The full text was an elaborate defence of reason in women and a strong appeal to men to use reason in their own thinking about women. Time and again Wollstonecraft appealed to reason as the highest faculty in human life:

I love man as my fellow; but his scepter, real, or usurped, extends not to me, *unless the reason of an individual demands my homage; and even then the submission is to reason, and not to man.* In fact, the conduct of an accountable being must be regulated by the operations of its own reason; or, on what foundation rests the throne of God?  
35

Reason will reform the world, she claimed. Reason was the "stamen of immortality". 36

The appeal to reason, however, was not heeded by those directly involved with the French Revolution, and in 1793 "The Reign of Terror" began and the guillotine ran wild severing head from body of thousands of individuals who did not think according to the latest ideology. Manon Roland was reputed to have said to the statue of liberty overlooking the scaffold as she climbed to her death: "O Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name?" 37 Théroigne de Méricourt, the founder of the Amazons battalion had asked the public to "stop and reflect" about the direction it was moving towards. 38 Then during the Reign of Terror she was violently attacked and flogged by a crowd of women who disapproved of her support for a previous leader. Théroigne never recovered and spent her remaining years mentally insane.

Olympe de Gouges had ironically stated in Article IX of her original Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen that "woman has the right to mount the scaffold; she must equally have the right to mount the rostrum, provided that her demonstrations do not disturb the legally established public order." 39 Little did she expect then that her expression of opinion would lead to her own execution. In 1793 Marie Olympe de Gouges was tried and convicted of support for the monarchy and was executed by guillotine on the Place de la Révolution. 40 Reason, cut off from the body and running wild, was no longer able to integrate the passions of anger, greed, and revenge or the

ideals of equality, liberty, and fraternity. As Vergniauld stated: "The Revolution, like Saturn, is devouring its own children." 41

Mary Wollstonecraft writing in 1793-4 text entitled An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution and the Effect it has Produced in Europe reflected on the turn of events in a revolution that had promised so much: "I tremble, lest I should meet some unfortunate being, fleeing from the despotism of licentious freedom, hearing the snap of the guillotine at his heels." 42 Wollstonecraft understood the tendencies of the revolution even at its early stages, and she sought a new era of "equality, liberty, and fraternity" that did not bring along in its wake a distorted cry "or death". Her own tragic death during childbirth in 1797 ended her immediate particular contributions to the question of the relation of reason, sex identity, and the French Revolution.

The mantle for the defence of the equality of the two sexes was shared by the Marquis de Condorcet whose text which directly argued for women's rights was published posthumously in 1798. Sur l'admission des femmes au droit de Cité (On the Admission of Women the Rights of Citizenship) once again places reason against custom to prove its point. Condorcet began his important document with the following words:

Custom may familiarise mankind with the violation of their natural rights to such an extent, that even among those who have lost of been deprived of these rights, no one thinks of reclaiming them, or is even conscious that they have suffered any injustice...For example, have they not all violated the principle of the equality of rights in tranquilly depriving one-half of the human race of the right of taking part in the formation of laws by the exclusion of women from the rights of citizenship? 43

Next Condorcet brought forth the structure of his argument to demonstrate how reason could overcome the effects of custom:

To show that this exclusion is not an act of tyranny, it must be

proved either that the natural rights of women are not absolutely the same as those of men, or that women are not capable of exercising these rights.

But the rights of men result simply from the fact that they are *rational*, sentient beings, susceptible of acquiring ideas of morality, and or *reasoning* concerning those ideas. Women having, then, the same qualities, have necessarily the same rights. 44

In this summary the Cartesian key of reason was used as the fundamental principle to defend the equality of women with men for the practice of citizenship in the public sphere.

In conclusion, this preliminary study of the relation between Cartesianism, sex identity, and the French Revolution has demonstrated 1) an increasing historical appeal to reason as a central characteristic of human identity, and as a basis from which to defend equality of rights for women and men; 2) this equality focused first on a equal right to education and secondly on an equal right to activity in the public sphere, or citizenship; 3) women who participated in the French Revolution experienced an equal right to the guillotine and to physical action of the mob or the state; 4) after the revolution women did not immediately gain an equality of right to education or to citizenship; and 5) post-revolutionary debate focused on the question of whether this exclusion was in accordance with reason or was rather the effect of a residual tyranny of custom.

During this year of the bicentennial of the storming of the Bastille the Cartesian dualism which analogically severed mind from body still haunts discussions of sex identity. When reason and the principle of equality are detached from the living body which supports it something crucial is lost, and the "guillotine effect" can occur. On the other hand, when reason is integrated with the body and its extension in history and culture, it can open up new

possibilities for reformation and even revolution in the world. The challenge to contemporary philosophy of sex identity is consider how we can learn from the mistakes of the philosophy of sex identity two hundred years ago and to find the way to use the valuable key of reason in integral relation with the experiences of the body, of history, and of culture. 46 The goal is to find the ways in which reason can function as a 'key' rather than as a 'guillotine' in bringing women and men to a full understanding of their respective identities and capacity to act to reform the world in freedom. Then the revolutionary new society that so many have yearned for these past two hundred years may become closer to being achieved. 47.



## Footnotes

1. Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1953) p. 302. Strauss on Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France . "The French Revolution is the first "philosophic revolution." It is the first revolution which was made by men of letters, philosophers, "thoroughbred metaphysicians," "not as subordinate instruments and trumpeters of sedition, but as the chief contrivers and managers."; Gita May, "Rousseau's 'Antifeminism Reconsidered'" in French Women and The Age of Enlightenment, edited by Samia I. Spencer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 310. "Yet some of the most independent-minded women who played a leading part in revolutionary politics and on the European literary stage---the names of Mme de Staël, Mme Roland, and George Sand come readily to mind---remained loyally steadfast disciples and admirers of Rousseau throughout their turbulent lives."; Jacques Godechot France and the Atlantic Revolution of the Eighteenth Century (New York: The Free Press, 1965), p. 42-3. "The American Revolution had immense repercussions in Europe...They realized that the doctrines of the philosophes were not mere utopias but could be applied in practice."; George Rudé, The Crowd in the French Revolution (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 211. "While we may perhaps take it for granted that no considerable body of sans-culottes read Rousseau or any other philosophe first and, there is ample evidence that some pamphleteers and political writers addressed themselves directly to them, their women-folk included."

2. Rene Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill

Company, 1960) p. 26. Recently several philosophers have taken a negative view of the influence of Descartes on arguments about woman's identity. See, for example, Carolyn Merchant who criticizes the effect of Cartesianism on the mechanistic view of the feminine symbol of earth and on man's attempts to master the earth, in The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 188, 195, and 204-5. See also Susan Bordo's and Alison Jaggar's references to the "Cartesian masculinization of thought" and to their "challenges to Cartesianism" in Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 10, 75, and 207. I am in agreement with their assessment of the twentieth century effects of Cartesianism. In the present article, however, I want to examine the earlier consequences of this theory, namely up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. In that previous time frame I would argue that Cartesianism was an effective method for helping women to achieve an equality with men through the claim of the presence of a common reasoning ability. In this my analysis follows that of Genevieve Lloyd's The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). She argues that Descartes' method was accessible to both men and women who were equally endowed with "good sense or Reason." p. 48. It is also important to note Descartes' extensive philosophical correspondence with Princess Elizabeth which implies an openness to philosophical disputation with a woman that was exceptional.

3. Thomas Carlyle, The French Revolution: A History (New York: The Modern Library, 1934), p. 637. See also, p. 479. "For, lo, the great Guillotine, wondrous to behold, now stands there (August 21, 1792); the Doctor's Idea has

become Oak and Iron; the huge cyclopean axe falls in its grooves like the ram of the Pile-engine; swiftly snuffing out the light of men!"

4. Hilda Smith, Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth Century English Feminists (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983). See also Stock, Marie Louise. Poullain de la Barre: A Seventeenth Century Feminist. Ph. D. Dissertation. Columbia University, 1961.

5. Anna Maria von Schurman, The Learned Maid: or, Whether a Maid may be a Scholar? A Logick Exercise (London: John Redmayne, 1659).

6. Ibid., pp. 6-7.

7. Marie de Gournay, Egalité des hommes et des femmes in La Fille d'Alliance de Montaigne: Marie de Gournay (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1910), p. 64. Translated by Christiane Teasdale as are all other passages from this text.

8. Ibid., p. 70.

9. Marie de Gournay, Grief des Dames in La Fille d'Alliance, op. cit. p. 96.

10. François Poullain de la Barre, The Woman as Good as the Man: Or, the Equality of Both Sexes (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), p. 66.

11. Ibid., pp. 102-3.

12. Ibid., p. 114.

13. Ibid., p. 119.

14. Mary Astell, A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest (New York: Source Book Press, 1970), p. 18.

15. Ibid., p. 73.

16. Ibid., p. 81. "Knowledge in a proper and restricted Sense and as appropriated to Science, signifies that clear Perception which is follow'd by a firm assent to Conclusions rightly drawn from Premises of which we have clear and distinct Ideas. Which Premises or Principles must be so clear and Evident, that supposing us reasonable Creatures, and free from Prejudices and Passions, (which for the time they predominate as good as deprive us of our Reason) we cannot without our assent from them without manifest violence to our Reason."

17. Mary Astell, An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex (New York: Source Book Press, 1970), pp. 7-8.

18. Ibid., pp. 32-3.

19. Ibid., pp. 39-40.

20. Thomas Paine, Common Sense in The Life and Major Writings of Thomas Paine (Secaucus, N.J., 1974), p. 9.

21. Ibid.

22. Marie Jean Antoine Marquis de Condorcet, Recherches Historiques et Politiques sur Les Etats-unis de L'Amérique septentrionale, avec quatre Lettres d'un Bourgeois de New Haven sur l'unité de la législation (Paris: A Colle, 1788) pp. 280-1. Translated by Christiane Teasdale. My italics.

23. Rudé, op. cit., p. 152.

24. Thériouque de Méricourt in Halina Sokolnikova, Nine Women Drawn from the Epoch of the French Revolution (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932), p. 26. My italics.

25. Etta Palm d'Aelders, "Adresse des citoyennes françoise à l'Assemblée nationale" in Darline Gay Levy, et. al, Women in Revolutionary Paris 1789-1795: Selected Documents with Notes and Commentary (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979) pp. 75-6. My italics.

26. Olympe de Gouges, "Les Droits de la Femme" in Levy, Ibid., p. 88.

27. Ibid., p. 90.

28. Ibid. My italics.

29. Ibid., p. 92. My italics.

30. Ibid., p. 90.

31. Edmund Burke Reflections on the Revolution in France and Thomas Paine The Rights of Man (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961); A Wollstonecraft Anthology, Edited by Janet M. Todd (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977) Against Burke's claim that women were primarily identified with beauty and not with moral virtue because of the natural weakness of their nature Wollstonecraft argued: "If beautiful weakness be interwoven in a woman's frame, if the chief business of her life be (as you insinuate) to inspire love, and Nature has made an eternal distinction between the qualities that dignify a rational being and this animal perfection, her duty and happiness in this life must clash with any preparation for a more exalted state." p. 77.

32. Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1975), p. 5. My italics.

33. Ibid. My italics.

34. Ibid., p. 6. My italics.

35. Ibid., p. 37. My italics.

36. Ibid., p. 52. Mt italics.

37. Sokolnivoka, op. cit., p. 124.

38. Ibid., p. 31.

39. Olympe de Gouges, in Levy, op. cit., p. 91.

40. Levy, Ibid. "Bulletin de Tribunal criminel révolutionnaire" , pp. 253-259.

41. Carlyle, op. cit., p. 631.

42. A Wollstonecraft Anthology, op. cit., p. 132.

43. Marie Jean Antoine Marquis de Condorcet, The First Essay on The Political Rights of Women, A Translation of "Sur l'admission des femmes au droit de Cité" by Dr. Alice Drysdale Vickery (Letchworth: Garden City Press Limited, 19--), p. 5.

44. Ibid. My italics.

45. This appropriate use of reason was identified by Thomas Paine as an 'Archimedian lever'. In The Rights of Man, op. cit., p. 394. "What Archimedes said of the mechanical powers, may be applied to reason and liberty: 'Had we', said he, 'a place to stand upon, we might raise the world.'"

46. The question of the proper relation of reason and the body in its extension into history and culture was raised almost immediately after the French Revolution in specific relation to the question of sex identity. For example, Condorcet claimed in "Sur l'admission..", op. cit., p. 7, that there was a

difference between the experience and reason of men and of women, "Women are not governed, it is true, by the reason (and experience) of men; they are governed by their own reason (and experience)." Wollstonecraft undertook to formulate her solutions to this question in her thorough critique of Rousseau in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, op. cit., pp. 87-90. "The rights of humanity have been thus confined to the male line from Adam downwards. Rousseau would carry his male aristocracy still further...But all Rousseau's errors in reasoning arose from sensibility, and sensibility to their charms women are very ready to forgive! When he should have reasoned he became impassioned, and reflection inflamed his imagination instead of enlightening his understanding." To follow up this question in contemporary texts see: Louise Marcil-Lacoste, La Raison en procès: Essais sur la philosophie et le sexisme (Montréal: Editions Hurtubise HMH Ltée, 1987); Carol McMillan, Women, Reason, and Nature: Some Philosophical Problems with Feminism (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982); Genevieve Lloyd, The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy, op. cit.; and Jean Bethke Elshtain, Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

47. In contemporary times we find a similar Cartesian tendency, in the drive towards a unisex model of humanity. It is this tendency that has led some philosophers to condemn Cartesianism because of its separation of mind from body, and of the particular effects that this has on woman's identity. The goal is to find the appropriate integration of body and mind, which allows for an equality in the faculty of reason, but also allows for a differentiation in some significant areas of data of consciousness.